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SUBJECT: THE AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH INTERNAL SECURITY
MINISTER DICHTER: ACTION AGAINST SETTLER VIOLENCE,
SECURITY COOPERATION WITH PA, CONCERN ABOUT HAMAS' GROWING
STRENGTH IN GAZA

Classified By: Ambassador James B. Cunningham, Reason 1.4 (b) (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. The Ambassador called on Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter October 30. They discussed the GOI's plans for dealing with extremist settler violence, Israeli security cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, and Hamas' ongoing efforts to develop its military capabilities in Gaza. On stopping settler violence, Dichter said the GOI was improving the cooperation among the IDF, police and border police. A key issue was training IDF soldiers to develop hard evidence against settlers that could be used in Israeli courts. Dichter noted that the Shin Bet had destroyed the so-called "settler underground" in the 1980s and might have to do the same again. On cooperation with the PA, Dichter agreed that PA security capabilities were increasing rapidly. He praised the role of USSC Lt. General Dayton in this regard. Dichter said the resignation of PA general intelligence commander Tirawi was an important step forward, but noted that the PA needed to develop an "integrated chain" of security under a unified command. Dichter complained that Egypt was still not doing enough to stop smuggling into Gaza, adding that he now calls Hamas an "army of terrorists" rather than a terrorist organization because of the marked improvement in their conventional military capabilities. The Ambassador stressed the importance of the rule of law for both Palestinians and Israelis, noting that we are glad to see the GOI taking action against settler violence. He noted the international community's new emphasis on assisting the PA in developing a functioning legal system as an essential part of the security equation. He said we are providing Egypt with some technical assistance in dealing with smuggling, but noted that we agree on the need for greater Egyptian cooperation in keeping Hamas isolated. End Summary.

Dealing with Settler Violence

¶2. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied by PolCouns, called on Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter October 30. Dichter was joined by his office director Mati Gill, director of the ministry's international relations department Natan Rotenberg, and intelligence coordinator Zachi Chefetz. The Ambassador began by asking Dichter about a coordinating meeting organized by Defense Minister Barak earlier that week to coordinate the security services' response to increasing acts of violence by settler extremists. Dichter agreed there has been an increase in settler violence against Palestinians and also against IDF soldiers and Israeli police. The IDF, Israeli national police, and border police who report to the Minister of Defense all operate in the West Bank. The key is to coordinate their different roles.

¶3. (C) Dichter said the main problem was developing hard evidence against the settlers in order to make charges stand up in Israeli courts. Even if the IDF catches a settler red-handed in an act of violence, if there is no witness to testify, the courts will release the culprit. In the last

year the number of extremist settlers who were arrested doubled over the previous year, but it was still not enough to deter them. The new coordination initiated by Barak will help, as will efforts to train IDF soldiers in how to gather evidence. There was some push-back, however, particularly from reservists who felt that this was not part of their duties. The third element is an effort by the State Attorney to explain to Israeli judges the special circumstances surrounding the phenomenon of settler violence, which will hopefully lead to more convictions. Dichter noted that the MOD has powers in the West Bank that the GOI lacks inside Green Line Israel, and therefore the GOI can use administrative bans and administrative detentions if necessary, but he added that the government's strong preference is to deal with settler violence through the courts.

¶4. (C) Dichter explained that violent extremists are a small minority of settlers, but they are capable of attacking anyone. They now pose a threat to the leaders of the West Bank settlers themselves, who are intimidated from standing up to the extremists. Dichter noted that the GOI had brought down the so-called "settler underground" in the 1980s, but the "underground" appears to have returned in the past year or so. Dichter complained that there are also almost daily "provocations" by extreme left wing activists, some of them Israelis and some Americans and Europeans. Actions such as marching in the middle of Hebron or attempting to tear down the security fence amounted to pouring gas on the fire. The Ambassador noted that the rule of law is important for both Palestinians and Israelis, adding that we are pleased to see the GOI taking action to stop settler violence.

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Need Unified Palestinian Security

¶5. (C) Dichter said that despite uncertainty about whether there will be a clash between Fatah and Hamas over the legitimacy of Mahmoud Abbas' mandate after January 9, the West Bank security situation is improving, especially in Jenin and Hebron. While it is clear that Hamas is responsible if a rocket is launched from Gaza the situation is ambiguous in the West Bank. Israelis are aware that unlike Qassam rockets, which rarely kill, one suicide bomber can kill as many as thirty people. Hamas is continuing to try to send suicide bombers into Israel through Sinai. The Israeli security services are thwarting attempted suicide bombings every few days. Dichter praised the efforts of USSC Lt General Dayton, noting that due to the "great job" performed by Dayton, the PA is starting to have an effective security force.

¶6. (C) The Ambassador noted that we have made a lot of progress during the past few months working with Israel and the PA on security and economic development in the West Bank.

We are aware, however, that the situation can change quickly. Dichter commented that the resignation a few days earlier of PA general intelligence head Tawfiq Tirawi was an important development that would serve the interests of Abbas and PM Fayyad first, but also those of Israel. Tirawi's resignation was not enough, however. What is needed is a unified chain of command for all the Palestinian security forces, and a credible system of justice. Only when there is a unified chain of command will there be a possibility that Israel will hand over security responsibility to the PA.

Dichter added that crime is also a factor, pointing out that sixty percent of cars stolen in Israel end up in the West Bank. Criminals cannot be allowed to feel that the PA is their sanctuary. The Ambassador said that the concept of building Palestinian security institutions is at the core of international efforts. The PA needs a functioning legal system, courts, and jails as well as effective security services, which are being trained to have a sense of responsibility to civilian authorities. This will take time.

Hamas Now a Terrorist Army

¶7. (C) Dichter said that for the past seven years, Hamas has copied Hizballah's role in Lebanon. Since Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in December 2005, Hamas has been able to maintain direct contact with Iran by traveling through Egypt.

In only three years, Hamas has transformed itself from a terrorist organization to an "army of terrorists" based on the Hizballah model. At the time of the Gaza withdrawal, Israel thought that Egypt would block smuggling, but Egypt has not done so effectively. The main center of smuggling, the area around Rafah, is only 4 kilometers. Egypt should be able to block the smuggling easily, but Egypt does not want to fight Hamas unless it has to. Dichter said that Egyptian Intelligence Minister Omar Soliman once asked him what Israel wants. Dichter said he replied that all Israel wants is for Egypt to fight the smuggling from Sinai into Gaza the same way it would fight smuggling from Sinai into Egypt. The Ambassador agreed this was a difficult problem. He noted that the U.S. is providing Egypt with technical assistance to help them combat smuggling, but the Egyptians want to keep U.S. support at a low profile. We need more Egyptian cooperation in isolating Hamas physically as well as politically.

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